GUIDE TO THE RY3 KAMCHADAL FILE

[The RY3 file is concerned with the Kamchadal or Italmen of the Kamchatka Peninsula in northeastern Siberia. According to 6: Antropova, the name Italmen should be used to refer to the natives of Kamchatka peninsula. Kamchadal refers to the mixed population of Italmens who have adopted many Russian customs and the Russians who have married Italmens and have become "Italmenized." Italmen culture no longer exists. It has been completely eradicated by two and a half centuries of Russian administration and mixture. Reconstructions of their culture have however been made on the basis of early reports. Italmens spoke a language related to Chuckchi and Koryak, of the Paleo-Asistic stock. Before Russian contact in the late 17th century, the population has been estimated to have been about 30,000. Although there were 4,217 Kamchadals in the 1926 census, only 868 of them could speak their native language. In the early 18th century, the Italmens were scattered all over the Peninsula with the greatest concentration in the valley of the Kamchatka River. Russian interest was initially in furs and they exploited the natives. This led to rebellions which together with epidemics reduced and weakened the population. Larger villages were formed with the remnants of various clans. These villages were ruled by elders who were approved by the Russian administration. The primary economic activity was fishing and secondarily the hunting of sea mammals. The Russians have tried to introduce horse and cattle herding and agriculture, but this has never been successful to any large extent. Shamanism was practiced aboriginally, but apparently not to the extent that it was among some of the neighboring peoples. The Italmens were converted to Christianity in the 18th century.

There are eleven sources in the RY3 file. These sources are either reports of early explorers and travelers or are reconstructions based on these reports. The basic source is 1: Krasheninnikov. Krasheninnikov was a member of an expedition of natural scientists sent by the Russian government in 1733 to explore Siberia and Kamchatka. It is an excellent report and forms the basis of contemporary knowledge about aboriginal Italmen customs. 7: Lesseps is based on a voyage in 1787-1788 by the interpreter for La Pérouse. It contains data on the Russian administration and various other topics. 27: Sauer was written by a member of the Billings expedition in 1789-1793 but the source contains mostly geographical data. Sarytschew was also a member of the Billings expedition, and source 28 contains a few ethnographic tidbits from his report. 29: Cochrane, who visited Kamchatka in 1821-1822 and married an Italmen woman, is primarily concerned with Russian abuse of the natives. Sources 22 and 24 were also written during the 19th century and contain scattered bits of ethnographic information. 5: Jochelson is a report on archeological excavations in Kamchatka; 17: Heizer is a brief discussion of the use of aconite poison in whale hunting based on secondary data; and 18: Yarmolinsky is an edited version of three folktales recorded by Jochelson in 1910. 6: Antropova is a brief overview of aboriginal Italmen culture based mainly on Krasheninnikov. It also contains brief data on the changes in Kamchadal life since Sovietization. It is recommended for a brief introductory cultural summary. The file's main value is its early and reliable reports, primarily Krasheninnikov. Since the sources in this file cover a period of over two centuries from early contact to modern times, it would be excellent for a researcher of acculturation and culture contact. It would be invaluable for a student of colonial administration of native peoples, particularly since the administration was non-Western. Some of the file pages lack the standard OWC codes and are in the typed format. The file was processed between 1952 and 1968.]